

SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL®

Stalled Sewage Plant Project Makes Progress

■ BY MANDY JACKSON

After pleas for action on a sewage treatment plant for the Tijuana River Valley, Rep. Bob Filner said he has received assurances the project will move forward soon.

Because the project had been stalled since 1990, the Tijuana River Valley and Estuary Beach Clean Up Act passed the House and Senate unanimously in 2000. It authorized a public-private partnership to build a treatment plant in Mexico.

The U.S. and Mexico governments will reimburse the private builder, San Diego-based **Bajagua**, through maintenance fees over several years for the \$250 million plant.

"Three years ago, because we couldn't get the International Boundary Waters Commission to look at it in a new way, (Congress) passed a bill to look at a public-private partnership," Filner said. "That was three years ago and nothing has happened."

On Sept. 4, Filner sent letters to acting IBWC commissioner Debra Little and James Connaughton, chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality, demanding action on the sewage treatment plant.

Little recently assured him that substantial progress has been made in negotiations with the Mexican government in the last few weeks, Filner said.

If a treaty is in fact signed soon, as Little said, the U.S. and Mexican governments would negotiate a contract with Bajagua so the company can build the treatment plant. Construction should take about 15 months.

According to Filner, the amount of sewage produced by Tijuana businesses and residents has more than doubled in the last 10 years, but the city's sewage treatment plant has not kept up.

More than 50 million gallons of sewage makes its way from the Tijuana River to the Pacific Ocean daily. The current plant can handle only 25 million gallons of sewage a day.

Aside from Filner's recent letters to Little and Connaughton, Congress has been threatening the IBWC through other means.

Filner may cite the IBWC for contempt of Congress if there is no progress.

Also, the California Water Quality Control Board lawsuit against the IBWC for not cleaning sewage properly is scheduled to go to trial in March. However, Filner noted, the commission will have a stronger defense against the suit if it has an agreement in place.